

January 18, 2013

City of Fresno Planning Commission
Ms. Jaime Holt, Chair

Attn: Mr. Keith Bergthold, Assistant Director
Development and Resource Management
City of Fresno
2600 Fresno Street, Room 3065
Fresno, CA 93721

Subject: Fresno General Plan Update, San Joaquin River Parkway

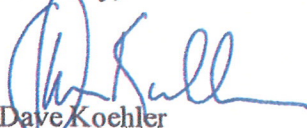
Dear Chair Holt and Planning Commissioners:

The San Joaquin River Parkway represents a signature amenity for the City of Fresno. Today, the Parkway comprises about 4,000 public acres of land and 7 miles of the planned 23-mile multiple use Lewis S. Eaton Trail between Friant Dam and Highway 99.

The Parkway contributes greatly to our quality of life, providing outdoor recreation and education opportunities as well as providing ecosystem infrastructure to improve our local economy and public health. On behalf of the San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, I'm pleased to provide the attached letter from Patrick Miller, 2M Associates, as well as the Parkway transportation plan prepared by Nelson Nygaard as our recommendations for the General Plan Update. Thank you for your consideration of including these to enhance the Parkway as a regional treasure for our community.

I look forward to making a brief presentation to the Commission at the upcoming General Plan Update workshop to be held January 23. I welcome any questions and will be happy to provide any further information the Commission may like to have regarding the Parkway.

Sincerely,



Dave Koehler
Executive Director

enclosures

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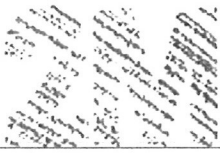
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CREATING AND PROTECTING THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER PARKWAY

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2M Associates
Landscape Architecture,
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January 18, 2013

San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust
11605 Old Friant Road
Fresno, CA 93730

Attn: Mr. Dave Koehler, Executive Director

**Re: City of Fresno General Plan & Development Code Update
City of Fresno Planning Commission January 23, 2013 Workshop: Resource
Conservation & Public Utilities**

Dear Dave,

This overview is provided to encourage the City of Fresno to include goals and policies in the *Parks, Open Space, and Schools Element of the General Plan and Development Code Update*¹ (the General Plan Update) that reflect the unique value of the San Joaquin River Parkway (the Parkway) to the quality of life for all Fresno residents and that will realize the economic and sustainability benefits that accrue with the Parkway to the City.

The recommendations below are made based on a 25-year perspective as a professional planner on projects related to the San Joaquin River Parkway from its inception to the present date. This work is bracketed by the preparation of the 1989 *San Joaquin River Parkway and Environs Conceptual Plan* and the current planning associated with the *San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan Update and Environmental Impact Report* by the San Joaquin River Conservancy (the Conservancy). This experience includes involvement in implementing many individual Parkway projects that must conform to the City's General Plan including the Lewis S. Eaton Trail through Woodward Park and Scout Island Outdoor Education center to name a few.

General Plan Update Perspective and Challenge

First, it should be recognized that the existing *City of Fresno 2025 General Plan*² (the General Plan) contains a specific section within the Open Space and Recreation Element addressing the San Joaquin River Parkway. This document has generally guided the City well over the last 10 years in addressing site-specific development and other infrastructure changes as they relate to the Parkway. The contained goals, objectives, and policies should be the starting point for any discussion about amended or new policies for the General Plan Update that is being formulated.

¹ City of Fresno. Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the City Of Fresno General Plan and Development Code Update. November 6, 2012.

² City of Fresno Planning and Development Department, Advanced Planning. *City of Fresno 2025 General Plan*. 2002.

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The General Plan Update should include and/or amend policies that, while consistent with the resource protection goals of the Parkway, will recognize that provision of public access for education and outdoor recreation purposes is not keeping pace with Parkway land acquisition and the demand for expanded opportunities presented by a growing population within the City.

The City of Fresno is now essentially built out to the San Joaquin River bluff tops and the edge of the Parkway. While San Joaquin River and the Parkway are arguably the City of Fresno's greatest public open space amenities, they are not necessarily highly accessible and usable for its residents. New opportunities for expanded public access to the Parkway from within the City, particularly access that would benefit the entire City populace, is now limited to essentially one area, the San Joaquin River Conservancy's Fresno River West Open Area. Most Parkway lands within the City, such as Scout Island Outdoor Education Center or the Millburn Unit of the San Joaquin River Ecological Preserve, are not open for general public use. In other instances, public lands such as the City's Riverbottom Park are relatively small and even when opened will mostly benefit to the immediate residents of the area. Lastly the one large Parkway unit that is now open and publically accessible, the Conservancy's Jensen River Ranch, is accessed through Woodward Park and that park is already operating at capacity on many weekends further restricting access.

The General Plan Update challenge therefore to consider amending and updating policies based on:

- The need to continue to support land acquisition for the Parkway and stewardship of its resources.
- The need for access by residents to the Parkway natural lands for outdoor education and low-impact recreation uses.
- The need for the expansion of the Lewis S. Eaton Trail, which includes connecting and integrating it into the regional trail plans for Fresno and Madera Counties.
- The inclusion of policies that enable that access in a sustainable manner.
- To ability to assure economic justice for all residents to take advantage of the Parkway, including policies that support direct access to the river from the City via it's streets, bicycle and pedestrian routes, and mass-transit systems.

General Access

For the Parkway to be a multiple-use amenity, it must be accessible to the public. While access policies might be thought of as important in the transportation element for the General Plan, internal consistency between plan elements, in this case the resource protection, outdoor recreation, and transportation goals and policies of the General Plan, are also important from a planning perspective.

The attached report titled "*San Joaquin River Parkway Short Term Transportation Plan*" looks at how people currently do, and do not, have access to the Parkway. Among other findings that should be considered in the General Plan Update, four recommendations culled from that report that should be included in the City's goals and policies are:

- ***Provide Improved Informational Signage, Wayfinding and Access Information:*** A common theme amongst all users is the challenge in just locating Parkway access points. For users arriving by private vehicle, a secondary challenge at some locations is finding parking that is both public and permissible. For facilities along the Eaton Trail, this is less of an issue since the trail is in clear sight of Friant Road and several signalized crossings are provided for safety. However, at other locations access points are often minimally marked and may not have any defining signage at all. In addition, much of the access information as of present (such as times of operation and parking) is not available online.
- ***Improve Vehicle and Bicycle Parking Facilities:*** High quality parking areas are either: a) not available in many locations or b) not consistently available. Parking facilities do not necessarily need to be paved (other permeable materials could be used to reduce run-off impacts), but they should provide the user with a consistently available location, particularly to be ADA compatible. Bicycle parking/storage facilities could be increased throughout the Parkway with the anticipation that an extended trail network would induce

additional demand for recreational and commuter bicyclists.

- ***Shuttle Service and Bicycle Rental Program:*** If funds become available, the policies that enable a bicycle rental program and possibly a seasonal/weekend shuttle service should be considered.

Specific Public Access - River West Open Space Area

At last Thursday's City Council workshop, a series of site-specific policy statements, with one modification, were recommended by the Fresno City Manager Mark Scott in a letter to the Council (dated December 20, 2012; see attached) for inclusion in the General Plan. The one modification was to include a 60-car staging area on the east end of the Open Space Area that would be accessed from old Highway 99. These recommendations are unfortunate in many ways and the Planning Commission is encouraged to pause, take a step back, consider the potential value of the San Joaquin River Parkway in general and the Fresno River West Open Space Area in particular to the entire City of Fresno, consider these recommendations in light of the existing Fresno General Plan policies, and then move to eliminate these recommendations based on the planning justifications as described below.

First, many of the policies recommended by the City Manager essentially circumvent a site-specific planning process being conducted by the San Joaquin River Conservancy, the owner of the property, in cooperation with the City of Fresno. It would be wise to allow this detailed area planning and environmental review, that involves the preparation of a full Environmental Impact Report, to move forward. This process will evaluate the project's consistency with the existing City of Fresno 2025 General Plan policies and will result in identifying the environmentally superior project. This process will assure that both site protection of resources and allowance of public use incorporating the good-neighbor policies that are contained within the existing Parkway Master Plan and Fresno General Plan will take place. Additionally, to incorporate the City Manager's recommendations into the General Plan Update may unnecessarily complicate the General Plan Update process in that it may then be required to consider a detailed project-level analysis in what otherwise would be excluded from a Master EIR document.

Second, as stated by the City Manager, these "recommendations reflect the expectations of the City and the community". This conclusion is not consistent with the existing General Plan policies (Policy F-7-C) nor supported by the extensive public outreach program that has been conducted by the Conservancy about the area. It does however represent the perspectives of a limited number of neighbors who live near the Open Space Area. This bias is not consistent with the reason the property was purchased and reduces the benefit the Open Space Area could have for the City of Fresno. The following helps explain this perspective:

Site History and Purpose: Everyone should take heed of the fact that without the acquisition of the Fresno River West Open Space Area for public use in 2003, the land had been targeted for housing development of 700 homes. This vision of housing development is precisely why West Riverview Drive and North Del Mar Avenue are designed to City standards as collector streets and have no houses that front them. What these two collector streets do have is landscaped berms and walls that visually divorce the adjacent neighborhoods from the street view. Those property owners who have benefited most from the acquisition are those who live on the leading edge of the bluffs that overlook the Open Space Area. They have an assured open space view and not one of rooftops, streets, and street lights.

The Open Space Area was purchased by a consortium of public-interest organizations (the Trust for Public Land, the San Joaquin River Conservancy, and the San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust with additional funding from the Packard Foundation) from the Spano family, who was looking for an alternative to developing their former farmland that would specifically benefit the community. The question needs to be asked if the policies proposed by the City Manager are consistent with that benefit in the context of the vision being forwarded in the General Plan and the existing infrastructure.

The design conditions of West Riverview Drive and North Del Mar Avenue also bring to question the justification by the City Manager for limiting access into the Open Space Area. Furthermore, this recommendation is not based on a traffic analysis that would be part of an environmental document for the Open Space Area, or if accepted, part of the General Plan Master EIR.

Vehicular Access and Traffic: The design conditions of West Riverview Drive and North Del Mar Avenue mentioned above also bring to question the justification by the City Manager for limiting access into the Open Space Area. Furthermore, this recommendation is not based on any supportive traffic analysis that would be otherwise included as part of the EIR for the Open Space Preserve

The City's *Bicycle, Pedestrian, & Trails Master Plan*³ clearly identifies Audubon Drive, North Del Mar Avenue, and West Riverview Drive to the intersection of West Bluff Avenue as Class II bicycle lane streets leading to a Class I bicycle trail into the Open Space Area. Specific guidelines are included within the *Bicycle, Pedestrian, & Trails Master Plan* that accommodate bicycle safety considerations. The City Manager's recommendations imply that bicycle use along these streets is incompatible with vehicular use of the streets, therefore vehicular access should not be provided nor even considered. This is simply not the case and does not recognize the value of the City's own adopted plans and safety guidelines for pedestrian and bicycle access in and around the City.

Parking and Sustainability⁴: One aspect of sustainability is either not driving to a site or driving the shortest distance possible. It is recommended that the Park element of the General Plan have a policy that encourages direct access to the Parkway for the residents of Fresno. The recommendations provided by the City Manager will require all vehicular access to cross the river on Highway 41, travel into Madera County, then turn around to again cross the river on the old Highway 41 bridge to enter the Open Space Area via an undercrossing of Highway 41 on the eastern end of the Open Space Area. This is an approximately 10 mile longer route from the nearest Highway 41 on-ramp at Friant Road than if direct access were provided into the site from the existing City of Fresno street network. This is not justifiable given types of proposed General Plan Update policies recommended through the General Plan working paper process to:

- Strategically connect General Plan goals and policies to implementation of infrastructure and broad-based energy efficiency required to ensure long-term economic development opportunities for business and quality of life.
- Recognize the need for energy-efficient measures and actions the City can take to minimize the adverse impacts of growth and development on climate change and air quality that would be part of a Climate Action Plan.

³ Fher & Peers. *City of Fresno Bicycle, Pedestrian, & Trails Master Plan*. 2010.

⁴ *Sustainability* is a term used to address a wide range of issues that ultimately affect our quality-of-life. In its most widely recognized definition, it means making choices today that will not limit our children's ability to have a high quality-of-life when they reach our age. Sustainability can be implemented operationally through policies and decisions that consistently maintain quality-of-life opportunities for all residents and communities. [Sustainability relates to many things we have heard about for years – having readily available and safe drinking water, having clean air that we can feel comfortable to breathe, avoiding toxic wastes and material use in our communities and reducing the amount of garbage we send to the landfill. It also relates to maintaining business and industry development, expansion, entrepreneurship and job creation opportunities throughout our city, and providing different transportation modes that connect housing with jobs. In the General Plan update, choices about land use and development patterns will affect how much we drive and how that impacts air pollution, time with our family and in many cases a loss of important agricultural or natural resource lands. Because the General Plan process creates policies that will shape the form of our community, striving for a more sustainable outcome means the General Plan needs to look carefully at how and where we grow. It also means ensuring adequate fiscal resources for the City. Computer models are now available that can enable us to ensure that the new General Plan has positive net benefits for the City. Source: *Frequently Asked Questions*, City of Fresno General Plan and Development Code Update web pages.

ADA Parking


The recommended policies include a provision that "disabled, public parking and equestrian trailer parking, as may be required, can be created at Spano Park and near Spano Park, in coordination with, and easements provided by, adjacent property owners, as long as such parking facilities do not conflict with the remainder of these recommendations". This is a disingenuous statement that obfuscates the challenge of providing ADA access to the Open Space Area and does not belong in a General Plan Update. Constructing an ADA-compliant trail route down the approximate 60-foot-high bluffs between Spano Park and the Open Space Area would require a 1,200-foot-long trail cut into the bluffs and be located very close to residents. This would be inconsistent with the existing Parkway Master Plan and City General Plan policies. Furthermore, Spano Park is an existing developed City park that cannot accommodate equestrian parking.

General Plan Guiding Conclusions

The existing City General Plan contains policies related to the Parkway that should be amended in light of:

- Assuring expanded and direct public access to the Parkway that would benefit the citizens of Fresno as a whole;
- Recognizing the sustainability benefits that could accrue to the City with sensitive access planning;
- Recognizing the physical opportunities and constraints of remaining direct public access opportunities available to the City;
- Allowing for orderly detailed site planning to occur guided by program-level policies within the context of both the Conservancy's San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan Update and the City's General Plan Update; and
- Assuring internal consistency between resource protection, outdoor recreation, and transportation goals and policies.

Thank you,
2M Associates

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick T. Miller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Patrick" and last name "Miller" clearly distinguishable.

Patrick T. Miller, FASLA
Partner

San Joaquin River Parkway

Existing and Master-Planned Facilities

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Existing Parkway Facility | | Planned Parkway Facility |
| | Ecological Reserve | | Existing Hiking Trail |
| | Parkway Land | | Existing Multiuse Trail |
| | Nearby Recreational | | Planned Hiking Trail* |
| | | | Planned Multiuse Trail* |
| | Accessible | | Hiking Trails |
| | Bike Trails | | Nature Observation |
| | Camping | | Parking |
| | Canoing | | Picnic Facilities |
| | Conservation Education | | Planned River Crossing |
| | Cultural Interest | | Restrooms |
| | Equestrian Trails | | SJR Ecological Reserve |
| | Fishing Access | | Vista Point |
| | Golf Course | | Visitor Center |

*Planned trail alignments, especially those shown on private property, are shown only for illustrative purposes. The location of all Parkway facilities are subject to acquiring property or easements from willing sellers, site- and project-specific design, environmental review, and public participation.



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